

*Decline, Renewal and the City in Popular Music Culture: Beyond the Beatles.* By Sara Cohen. Hampshire, UK and Burlington, USA: Ashgate. 2007. 252 pages. £60.00 (Hardback) £15.99 (Paperback).

Cohen's book is a very welcome addition to the rapidly increasing innovative series of titles from Ashgate, one publisher persistently acknowledging the value of such needed and valuable works. This title is in Ashgate's Popular and Folk Music series, and goes well with its Geography titles. Sara Cohen has produced a series of geography-informing papers and other contributions on music, the city, music and place, the media, popular culture, and the interchange between 'mediated' and otherwise culture. Her work is a compilation monograph of three major investigations, in Liverpool, in the last almost twenty years, and very much up to date.

Of particular interest to geographers, to urban geographers, and cultural geographers more widely, are her examinations, on the one hand, of politics and the ideas of regeneration, culture, and, that especially devious word 'creativity'; on the other hand, ethnography, cultural diversity and complexity vis-à-vis so-called institutional and business efforts to claim the cultural arena, and how cities have become a useful tool through which to do so; creativity, and music being more recent examples of their wares. Indeed, her attention to the often-polarisation, or mutual exclusion, of creativity and what power does [and/or not] for music is especially required reading for over zealous urban geography city renewalists. The book reminded me of the IBG-RGS session last summer 07 when a multi-session on 'creativity' was almost wholly appropriated by thinking creativity equals corporate action; 'culture' its object.

Liverpool, UK: City of Culture of the year [the very term appropriates - and excludes - immediately]; the Beatles were there; a city of complexity and diversity of cultures across its life and landscape. Which way should the urban geographer focus? Cohen makes us think, critically, and reflexively. She connects with Zukin's valuable book *The Culture of Cities*, 1990, and Finnegan's *Music making in an English town*- the unheralded music-culture-city of Milton Keynes, obviously deserving more, but perhaps benefiting from its quiet musical culture from being unlabelled.

There is also value for cultural geographers in this text's attention to musical landscape, musical ethnography. And thus for me, as a cultural geographer, the book is particularly animating for its remarks regarding 'creativity'. Taking welcome issue with Peter Hall, godfather of Modern urbanism in the UK, for what creativity is. This does seem of core importance to much debate on cities, regeneration, tourism, heritage, creative industries/quarters and so on. Pointing to her ethnographic [grounded, evidenced work] in Liverpool, and recalling Finnegan, she found creativity [in music at least] across the city; the possibility and opportunity for more creativity [that might depend more on freedom, openness and lack of institutionalisation] around the city than in its Allocated

Core, so-called 'Quarter', unchallenged by the requirements of business, or a particular kind of city politics.

For a wider cultural and social geography too, Cohen engages core themes of ethnicity, cultural mobility [nee migration], musical landscapes, transatlantic influences and engagements with culture, the UK city region, and attention to Liverpool's exemplary multi-cultural heritage that refuses to respond to a reductivist City of Culture or Beatleism [my term]. Added to this, read the informative critical discussion of heritage-as-applied. She feeds into this maelstrom a fascinating mix of ethnicity, institutional perversity [policy making] and presents a wonderfully uneven story of process. The city is articulated through, and as, a clash of music business and cultural commercialised/politicised versions of creativity.

In chapter one, Cohen examines the complexity of heritage through and as music: the heritage of a city as boiled down to music alone; iconic, a simulacrum. In another, valuably for urban geography, she argues that for this city at least, music is conceived as the city. Cohen's thesis is that there is danger, intellectually as well as institutionally, and culturally, of reductionist versions of the city, here exemplified in Liverpool, as a city- example, as Liverpool = music = Beatles, or, more simply, Rock. Again, and specifically, we identify with her the clash between music business and cultural creativity. Liverpool's ongoing history and heritage is one of immigration, diversity, hybridity and complexity; diverse and multiple heritages, but some more easily appropriated than others, for obvious commercial, perhaps political and easy/lazy reasons.

She finds no prioritisation amongst the policy people to engage and listen to those who actually produce, or, rather, create, music. As her informants across the city demonstrate, musical creativity happens anywhere, or can, and often more outside realms of powerful influence, and their claims of support [sic].

There is a useful and informative section on the methods and approaches deployed in her research, of particular resonance the ethnographic closeness of enquiry used. A welcome intervention for urban geographers' efforts to push forward attention to lives rather than policies. The ethnographic work awkwardly informs, and welcomingly irritates, urban geographies' efforts to understand process outside the institutional. That, I urge and suggest, is where creativity lies. As Finnegan found in a wonderfully non-Creative City, Milton Keynes [1990]. Yet for Finnegan, Milton Keynes emerges as a very creative, cultural city, if not officially designated so: signified not in outward labelling, but in the lives, practices and activities amongst those living there. This would seem, congruent with Cohen's thesis, that the official labelling may tell us little about what is happening in and for lived urban geography.

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